

LB
HISTORICAL SERMON

— OF —

First Presbyterian Church,

EBENSBURG, PA.,

BY

REV. JOHN N. MAC GONIGLE, PASTOR.

Delivered July 9th, 1876.

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1876.

MINUTE.

At a meeting of the Session of the First Presbyterian Church, Ebensburg, held August 28, 1876, it was

Resolved, That we respectfully request of the Pastor, for publication, a copy of the Historical Sermon, delivered July 9, 1876.

To the Session :

BRETHREN :—I hereby tender you the requested copy of the Historical Sermon, regretting its meagreness, yet trusting that by its future perusal it may add to our interest in our Presbyterian Church.

Fraternally yours,

JOHN N. MAC GONIGLE.

HISTORICAL SERMON

— OF —

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

EBENSBURG, PA.

“Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.”—Eccles. 11: 1.

ON the Allegheny Mountains, near the summit, where the top of the peak touches the low-hanging cloud, in the midst of the primeval forests of pine and beech, where the limpid streams of sparkling water sing their songs of praise to the great Creator, there nestled, in the year 1840, a little town, comprising, with some limitations, what is now known as the East Ward of Ebensburg. Here there dwelt a few Presbyterians, who through choice or necessity were separated from the brethren of their faith, and worshiped God with their brethren in the Lord whose conscience and teaching had made them members of churches other than the Presbyterian. The sound of the voice of the herald of the cross ordained by “the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery,” was rarely heard. Communion with that mother-church, whose care of her children is ever so tender, was denied them. In order to enjoy the communion for which their souls longed, they found it necessary to take long journeys on horseback or by stage, which were at once fatiguing and monotonous, but many remaining faithful to that church through whose teaching the truth first reached their hearts, esteemed the journey not too long nor the fatigue too great a price to pay for communion with their brethren and their Lord, in that church and way in which their hearts had been taught and instructed.

In such untoward circumstances as these, the great majority of the Presbyterians who dwelt here united with the Welsh Indepen-

dent Church, with which they dwelt and labored. But the spirit of Presbyterianism, as strong in the mountains of America as in the mountains of Scotland, was not satisfied, but rather, desired a real, true home of its own. Beside this, there was a constant increase in Presbyterian population and a demand for Presbyterian preaching and teaching grew and increased.

On the 7th day of April, 1840, the Presbytery of Blairsville was in session in the church at Congruity, thither, to express the wish and desire of the Presbyterians of Ebensburg, went Mr. HARRISON KINKEAD. Having laid before them the desires of the people, the wants of the community and the promises of the field, the Presbytery responded to Judge KINKEAD's appeal by appointing supplies, who from 1840 until 1847, preached the word occasionally. In these seven years of the church's history, prior to its organization, there figure men and names, the memories of some of whom come down to us laden with the rich fragrance of labor and zeal and goodness, while the deeds and words and lives of others still wield their influence upon the present church. From among those who have died, we recall the names of KIRKPATRICK of Poke Run, McFARREN of Congruity, McCLUNG of Parnassus, and GILLET of Unity. From those who still live, we cull the names of DONALDSON of Eldersridge, HILL of Blairsville, CARROTHERS of Turtle Creek, and WOODEND of Saltsburgh. These all labored "in word and doctrine" for the building up of God's cause and church, that we might enjoy the fruit of their labors, which were indeed arduous. Their journeys hither and home again were all accomplished on horseback, attended with all the inconveniences of that old time mode of travel. The journeys, too, were long and fatiguing; many of the ministers riding fifty and sixty miles, through winter's cold and summer's heat. But we see and enjoy the results of their work, and let us hope that they who died after such earnest labor are enjoying "the rest that remaineth for the people of God," and that they who still live may see the little branch of God's planting, for which they wrought, become God's instrument in turning many to righteousness. During these years the services were held in the Court House, and the different churches of the town. Sometimes in the "Old Congregational Church on the back street," sometimes in a little Baptist Church near Centre street, but more frequently in the Court House, "the psalms our fathers sung," and the voice of the Presbyterian ministry were heard.

Through the course of these years the number of Presbyterians had increased, the wants of the field had become more apparent, and at the meeting of Presbytery in April, 1847, Revs. GEORGE HILL and ADAM TORRANCE were appointed a committee to examine the field and consider the advisability of occupying it. This committee reported very decidedly in favor of Presbytery's immediate occupation of the ground. At this time the old Portage railroad was the connecting line between the East and the West, and Summitville, situated at the summit of the mountains, was a vil-

lage of no mean proportions. Here, too, was a field for Presbyterian mission work, and the two cities "set upon an hill," furnished admirable centres for the spread of Christ's gospel. In June, 1847, the mission work on the Allegheny mountains was placed in charge of Mr. ANDREW McELWAIN, then a licentiate of Blairsville Presbytery. In October of the same year he was appointed the regular supply, to fill alternately the pulpits at Ebensburg and Summit. In order that Mr. McELWAIN might minister to the people in all the ordinances of God's house, he was ordained an evangelist. This service took place at New Alexandria, 1st February, 1848, when Dr. McFARREN presided and made the ordaining prayer, Rev. S. M. McCLUNG preaching, and Rev. W. HUGHES charging the evangelist. Mr. McELWAIN being now thoroughly furnished for his evangelistic work, went to his labor with zeal and earnestness. He labored well, "making a full proof of his ministry," by his constant preaching of the truth by word and example and by his association with the people in family visitation. As a result of his labors, a church was organized at Summit, 24th January, 1849, consisting of eight members and two elders, Messrs. VAUGHAN and DOUGLAS. Here and at Ebensburg Mr. McELWAIN still continued to preach. A movement was now set on foot among the Presbyterians in the Welsh Independent Church, for the organization of a Presbyterian Church, and the erection of a building for their use. The movement grew rapidly, and on March 28th, 1850, sixteen persons having received certificates from the Welsh Church, the First Presbyterian church of Ebensburg was formally organized. Revs. S. M. McCLUNG, S. SWAN and A. McELWAIN, with Elders KRATZER and VAUGHAN were the committee of organization. The church thus auspiciously organized has gone steadily forward until it has assumed the proportions which are noticeable in this the twenty-seventh year of its life.

THE CHURCH BUILDING.

Previous to the organization of the church, the effort for the erection of a house of worship, had been pushed forward zealously. Liberal contributions had been made by the members, and many of the churches in the Presbytery had contributed generously. The building in which we now worship was in course of erection when the church was organized. It was constructed by Mr. JAMES MYERS, at a cost of \$1590, and the building committee received it from him, May 6th, 1850. May 24th, 1850, it was first opened for divine service and June 10th, 1850, it was formally dedicated with a sermon by Rev. S. M. McCLUNG from 1 Tim. 3:15. "On that day twenty pews were rented, the highest at \$15, the lowest at \$3." The church still stands, substantially the same as it was on the day of its dedication. A few years ago some important changes and repairs were made and during the past year the change to "the modern pulpit," all of which have helped to make our church what it is, cheery, comfortable and homelike. God has ever

thrown the arm of his protecting care about it and shielded it from storm and fire, and we possess it yet, as the gift of those who labored before us in God's work.

When its foundations were laid it was near the centre of the town, since then, the movement has been westward and the limits and proportions of the town have increased considerably. Many new and modern buildings have been erected, the streets have been lengthened, and increased in number, public institutions have grown up about us, trade has increased and business prospered, and while God has blessed the church he has also blessed the town which gave it its place and its people.

PASTORS AND PREACHING.

After the organization of the church, Rev. ANDREW McELWAIN continued to supply it and the Summit church alternately. Though not having been formally installed, he was virtually the first pastor of the church. He labored faithfully, in the pulpit and in the homes of his people, and he saw much fruit of his labor. His preaching was of the sort that tends to instruction, and being (as one of our oldest brethren has said) "a great man for doctrine," he gave the church that teaching which helped to root and ground it in faith and love. His disposition was so kind and benevolent that he drew many friends about him and so linked the hearts of his people to his, that it was with grief that they parted with him, when, in the spring of 1853—after a three year's pastorate—he left to take charge of the church at Indiana, Pa. He now has charge of the church at Hestonville, Philadelphia.

Mr. McELWAIN was succeeded by Rev. R. SLEMMONS MORTON, who was installed November 10th, 1853, Rev. D. HARBISON preaching, Rev. A. B. QUAY charging the pastor, and Rev. McELWAIN charging the people. Mr. MORTON's pastorate continued through the brief space of one year and two months, during which time his work was in the main successful, and from the record of the church we learn that he labored zealously and faithfully, until his labors ceased by his release from his charge on January 10th, 1855. He is now pastor of the church at Enon Valley, Lawrence county, Pa.

After nearly a year of vacancy, the congregation presented a call to Rev. DAVID HARBISON of Ligonier, which he accepted. He was installed December 14th, 1855, when Rev. ROSS STEVENSON preached, Rev. N. H. GILLET charged the pastor, and Rev. GEO. HILL the people. The pastorate of Rev. HARBISON, which extended through eight years and nine months, was a successful one. He was "a workman, who, through God's grace, needed not to be ashamed," and with the sternness and straightforwardness of his Irish character and talents, he fearlessly wrought for and with God. His labor was blessed of God in that it was both zealous and characterized by a power of continuance which none of his successors nor predecessors have attained to. On being released,

October 5th, 1864, he went to the church at New Salem, Pa., where he served until the spring of this year, when he accepted a call to the Bridge Street church, Catasauqua, Pa.

June 20th, 1865, Rev. T. M. WILSON was installed by Rev. B. L. AGNEW preaching, Rev. Dr. SMITH charging the pastor, and Rev. N. H. GILBERT charging the people. Rev. WILSON was one of the most humble and lowly, and at the same time, most efficient men who ever filled the pulpit. He labored through two years and three months, ever following the example of his Divine Master, teaching the people with meekness and lowliness of heart. Being released, April 24th, 1867, he went to the West, where, after seven years of labor, he died at Rochelle, Ill., 22d February, 1874. Let us trust that the Master, whom he so zealously followed, has rewarded him with the crown which he has for them who faithfully bear the cross.

After having been vacant more than a year, the church succeeded in securing the services of Rev. B. M. KERR, who assumed the pastorate by a formal installation, July 2d, 1868. On this occasion the sermon was delivered by Rev. R. M. WALLACE, Rev. ROBERT CARROTHERS delivering the charges to pastor and people. Mr. KERR's pastorate continued through two years and nine months, during which time he, by his general good nature and his pulpit eloquence, won many friends and did much to the building up of God's cause. During his pastorate he instituted the "Young Men's Prayer-meeting," which has ever been a power for good in the church. Upon his release, April 25th, 1871, Mr. KERR went to New Castle, Pa., thence to Mercer, Pa., where he is now laboring.

Once again, for a period of one year and nine months, the church is without a pastor. At the expiration of this time, February 8th, 1873, a committee of Presbytery, consisting of Revs. T. R. EWING preaching, S. M. DAVIS charging the pastor, and W. A. FLEMING charging the people, installed Rev. J. WILLIAM EDIE. Mr. EDIE was a man who made himself known and felt among his people by his zeal, his activity and impetuosity. He was ever faithful, ever active, and by his earnest and successful effort he placed the church in a financial position, which it had never occupied before. Having greatly endeared himself to the hearts of his people, his death, which occurred September 10th, 1874, closed a pastorate of one year and seven months, and a successful ministry of many years. "Having died in the Lord, we trust that his works do follow him."

At a meeting of Presbytery, held in the church, May 11th, 1875, the present pastor was ordained and installed. On the occasion, the sermon was preached by Rev. JOHN GILLESPIE of Pittsburg, Pa., the charge to the people was delivered by Rev. R. M. BROWN, the charge to the pastor by Rev. GEO. HILL, D.D.

Thus, we see, that during its life of twenty-six years, the church has had seven pastors. During these years there have been but twenty years and seven months of regular pastoral preaching, while, during five years and eight months, or nearly one-fourth its life, the

church has been vacant and without a pastor's care. Dr. DONALDSON, in his "History of the Churches in Blairsville Presbytery," says: "Is it because this elevated situation is a tempting spot from which to spread their wings and soar away, that so many pastors make so short a sojourn here?" I cannot, I am sure, answer the Dr's. question. The "soaring away of pastors" arises usually, not from elevation, but from depression. Let us trust that for the present; depression may be removed, and elevation heightened, that continuing with each other we may be faithful "workers together with God, as dear children" joining hand to hand, linking heart to heart, and holding in contempt the petty struggles and annoyances, which the enemy of God's church is ever seeking to occasion, let us "put on the whole armor of God" and "fight a good fight," ever-looking to Him from whom cometh our help.

THE ELDERSHIP.

At the organization of the church, Mr. HARRISON KINKEAD was elected a ruling elder, in which office he has continued to the present. March 18th, 1852, Mr. GORDON SINCLAIR and Mr. JAS. S. CLARK were ordained ruling elders, the former of whom died in June, 1862, the latter, April 9th, 1861. The ordination of Mr. EZEKIEL HUGHES and Mr. RICHARD JONES took place, September 5th, 1863. Mr. HUGHES was dismissed to Iowa City, February, 1868, Judge JONES still continues in the office. Mr. DAVID J. JONES was ordained March 30th, 1861, and was dismissed to Johnstown, April 26th, 1873. According to provision made by the General Assembly, the congregation adopted the "Rotary Eldership System," September 30th, 1875, at which time Mr. E. V. BARKER was elected for three years, Mr. GEO. A. KINKEAD, for two years, and Mr. R. E. SMITH, for one year, and October 4th, 1875, they were regularly ordained. These who have filled the office of ruling elder, have all, faithfully and to the best of their ability discharged the duties of their office.

THE MEMBERSHIP.

The church began its organized existence, twenty-six years ago, with sixteen members, viz: Mr. HARRISON KINKEAD, Mrs. PAMILLA KINKEAD, Mr. EZEKIEL HUGHES, Mrs. HARRIET HUGHES, Dr. D. W. LEWIS, Mrs. MARIA LEWIS, Mr. GEORGE LESLIE, Mrs. MARGARET LESLIE, Mr. ROBERT DAVIS, Mrs. JANE DAVIS, Mr. GORDON SINCLAIR, Mrs. BARBARA SINCLAIR, Mrs. MARY MOORE, Mrs. MATILDA DAVIS, Mrs. SARAH J. CLARK, Miss ELLEN STEWART. These all had been in communion with the Welsh Independent Church, whence they brought certificates. May 25th, 1850, the young congregation held its first communion, when nine new members were added. Of these, Maj. JOHN THOMPSON and his wife, and Mrs. JEMIMA HUTCHINSON presented the first certificates from the Presbyterian Church—they having come from the church at Blairsville. Mrs. MARY BUZZARD was also received on certificate.

MESSRS. JOHNSTON MOORE, GEORGE RODGERS, JAS. S. CLARK and MARK EDWARDS, and Mrs. ELLEN POWELL, were the first persons received on examination. Of these, Messrs. MOORE and RODGERS, who are still with us, became trustees, and Mr. CLARK became a ruling elder. Of the original sixteen members but two, Judge KINKEAD and Mrs. MARY MOORE, are now living among us. Mr. and Mrs. E. HUGHES are living in Iowa City. The majority of the remainder are dead, and the living have, by removal, gone beyond the trace of your historian. In the year 1859, during the pastorate of Mr. HARBISON, quite an accession was made to the church. Hitherto, Ebensburg and Summit had formed one charge. Now, however, the old Portage railroad having been abandoned, the church at Summit fell away, until finally, its remaining members were set over to Ebensburg. The old church in which they worshiped, now stands on the grounds of the hotel company at Cresson, where it is in use as the Mountain House Chapel. During the whole of the church's life it has had a total membership of 307. April 25th, 1876, the membership numbered 144, (25 of whom were received during the present pastorate,) and five having been dismissed since, the total membership now is 139. The members have, in general, been marked for their fidelity to "the faith once delivered to the saints," they have constantly contended for and consistently lived by it, and here and there, as we trace the record back, we see traces of the rod of discipline, which give evidence of occasional stumbling, yet they have ever been followed by submission, repentance and restoration. The members of the church have ever responded faithfully to the Lord's call for their consecration of this world's goods to holy purposes. They have ever given according to their ability to the advancement of God's cause, and the financial history of the church is in all respects creditable. The course of the church's life has, in the main, been placid and graceful. Here and there, of course, there have been ripples upon the otherwise unruffled stream, but, we trust that they have been overruled of God, in making the church more zealous, and more dependent upon Him who alone makes peace and contentment, in heaven and on earth. The church has, I believe, ever been characterized by its spirituality, ever keeping in mind the truth, that "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." It has been the fold in which many a wanderer has found shelter. It has been the Bethel of many a weary pilgrim, the Ebenezer of many a war worn soldier of the cross. It has ever wielded an influence for the good of its members and the moral education of the community.

From its membership has gone forth but one minister of the cross—that one, the Rev. RICHARD EVANS, who in the piety, nobility and self-denial of his character, took his life in his hand, and away in the wilds of Washington Territory, early in his ministry, gave it back to Him from whom he had received it.

THE SABBATH-SCHOOL.

On the first Sabbath in February, 1853, the Sabbath-school was organized. I do not know what its membership was at its organization, but we all know that its growth and influence have ever been proportionate with the growth and influence of the church. It now numbers 125, is self-supporting and during the past year did a praiseworthy mission work. Many are here to day, active workers in the church, who are indebted to the Sabbath-school for their religious training, and let us trust that through its instrumentality many more may be brought into the church.

CONCLUSION.

As we look back to-day, my brethren, over the past history of our church we are reminded that God has blessed us richly, and that, while we have done well, we still have not done what we ought. God, in his love and grace, his peace and mercy has ever been Immanuel to us, indeed. His richest blessings have been poured upon our heads, his open hand has supplied each want. His willing heart has heard and healed each cry and wound. Year after year the Holy Ghost has added to our church, and more than all, increased our grace. We see much yet to be accomplished for the Master. Many sheaves are still to be garnered, much fruit to be gathered in and much seed to be sown. The fading footprints of our fathers, the passing lives of our brethren, the tender love of our God and the blessed memories of those who have ceased from their labors, all remind us that this is the hour and this the day for labor. Now is the time to labor for and with the Lord. Now the time to "cast our bread upon the waters," that, like our fathers and brethren, who reared here an house for God, and made an altar for his worship, we, too, "may find it after many days."

CHURCH OFFICERS.

PASTOR,

REV. JOHN N. MAC GONIGLE.

RULING ELDERS,

HARRISON KINKEAD,	RICHARD JONES,
EUGENE V. BARKER,	GEO. A. KINKEAD,
R. E. SMITH.	

BOARD OF TRUSTEES,

A. A. BARKER,	JOHN THOMPSON,
ALEX. Y. JONES,	EDWARD ROBERTS,
GEO. M. READE,	VAL. S. BARKER.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SABBATH-SCHOOL,

ALEX. Y. JONES.

